



Coast Guard Flag Voice 32

DIVERSITY SUMMIT

To increase awareness and knowledge about Coast Guard diversity-related issues, our first major conference on that subject, "A Dialogue on Diversity," will take place at the Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut, 15-17 April 1999. A cross-section of Team Coast Guard, 250-300 members, will participate in a constructive dialogue at all levels, during which they can speak openly and honestly about their differences in a non-attributive atmosphere. They will share "best practices" as blueprints in addressing diversity issues and motivating others to initiate similar dialogues at their own units. The Diversity Advisory Committee (DAC) will attend the conference in conjunction with its Spring meeting. The conference will include general sessions featuring addresses by Coast Guard leaders, including the Commandant and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, followed by break-out sessions in which panels will lead attendees in discussing diversity-related issues. The conference also will include keynote addresses by diversity experts and a multicultural dinner. Some may ask, "With everything else going on in the Coast Guard and especially tight budgets this year, why are we doing this?" For starters, the Workforce Cultural Audit (WCA) clearly noted the Coast Guard must do a better job of helping all understand diversity management and why it's so important for our future. We could roll out a bunch of ALDISTs, Commandant Instructions, etc., but we all know these are some of the least effective ways to get people to understand. Real learning and understanding cultural issues occur only when individuals personally participate, provide their perspectives, receive immediate reactions from others, and challenge assumptions, stereotypes, and cultural biases. Facing one another as Coast Guard men and women who all want to succeed both individually and collectively as a team is the very best learning experience. As an organization striving to bring aboard and retain the very best workforce, one up to the challenges of the 21st Century, we must provide our people with the essential tools to succeed in a diverse workplace.

Our many dedicated Coast Guard men and women feel strongly about our organization's direction and want us to be the very best, especially with regard to our people. It's okay to have opinions about our human resources processes and policies, and honest dialog is healthy and absolutely critical if we are to position our workforce for the future. The Coast Guard must provide opportunities for our concerned members to openly discuss these and other similar issues in an appropriate, non-attributive environment with the facts provided from reliable sources. This summit is a step in that direction.

These are brief synopses of some of the panels:

COMMITTED LEADERS: THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESS. To ensure the success of workplace diversity, Coast Guard leaders must drive it and make it happen. Changing the physical complexion of the workplace is not enough. How do leaders create a climate of commitment and

creativity in which all people will thrive? The Vice Commandant and other senior leaders will participate.

INTERACTION BETWEEN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL. Military personnel and civilians work side by side, equally committed to accomplishing the Coast Guard's goals. Yet their work cultures and mind-set often are very different. Because military personnel alone staff many of our units, many military members have never worked with civilians and do not understand the civilian personnel system. On the other hand, civilians may have difficulty understanding military attitudes. How can we better understand and value the different attitudes and talents each population brings to the Coast Guard?

WORKFORCE 2015: A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE. During booming economic times, it has been difficult for the Coast Guard and many other Federal agencies to attract and recruit the best and brightest while competing with private industry. Yet our goal is to have a workforce that mirrors America by 2015. What does it take to be successful in recruiting a diverse workforce?

RACIAL HATRED OUTSIDE THE GATES. Current FBI studies show race-hating, anti-Government separatist groups now may be the most serious terrorist threat to United States citizens within our country. What are the social climate issues facing the Coast Guard and how can commands work with communities to build understanding and ease racial tensions?

MEN AND WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER. While the Coast Guard's policy on interpersonal relationships is designed to be gender-neutral, relationships between men and women sometimes are subjected to intense scrutiny. When this happens, women can become isolated due to career fear on both genders' part, deterring women's professional growth, career opportunities, and ultimate success. How do we foster working environments that include both men and women in all aspects of Service life?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: MAKING NEWLY REPORTED PERSONNEL FEEL WELCOME. Effectively integrating Team Coast Guard members, whether new to the Service or newly reported to a unit, is critical for the success of today's Coast Guard. How do we ensure newly reported personnel feel a part of the team and included in all aspects of unit life?

THE ADVANCEMENT AND ASSIGNMENT OF WOMEN AND MINORITIES: IS THERE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT AND SHOULD THERE BE? While their progress has been slow, women and minorities have continued to increase in numbers and rise within the organization, receiving promotions and assignments to high-visibility positions of leadership and trust. Do we understand assignment and advancement policies applying to women and minorities? What are our personal values on these issues? What happens to the Coast Guard when policies and values are not aligned?

A GLASS CEILING FOR MINORITY WOMEN OFFICERS? Although women were integrated into the active duty Coast Guard more than 25 years ago, only one minority woman officer has achieved the rank of O-5 and none have held a commanding officer position. Does an artificial glass ceiling work to these women's career disadvantage? How do we identify barriers to accessing, retaining, and advancing

minority women officers and support their advancement?

THE INFLUENCE OF STEREOTYPING IN OUR DAILY INTERACTIONS. Understanding why we think the way we think and do the things we do enables us to consider differences without judgment and understand our reactions to differences as extensions of our own values, beliefs, and preferences. How can we address subconscious, unintended acts of bias that adversely affect the workplace environment at a substantial cost to our organization?

THE STIGMA OF PREGNANCY IN THE WORKPLACE. Although official Coast Guard policy stipulates pregnancy should not impair a woman's career, some pregnant women feel they are stereotyped as less productive, committed, and aggressive than they were before they became pregnant even though their performance has remained the same. Supervisors, on the other hand, are sometimes frustrated with the difficulty of balancing a pregnant woman's health needs with mission accomplishment. What are the dynamics that exist in the workplace when women become pregnant and how do we implement the Coast Guard's pregnancy policy to foster an inclusive work environment and improve productivity?

Other panels will address the Coast Guard Reserve, the Auxiliary, multiple languages, religious differences in the workplace, and balancing work and life.

This will give you some idea of the challenging cultural issues we will take on. Yes, we will work "outside the box" and take some risks here, but this is critical to our progress as an organization that must be more than the sum of its parts to succeed in the future. I fully expect all who attend will grow in awareness and mutual understanding of our differences over those few days. Most importantly, we will all return to our respective units in a better position to help others make the progress critical for the Coast Guard. I look forward to participating!

Regards, FL Ames



[Flag Voice Contents](#)

This page is maintained by [HR Webmaster \(CG-1A\)](#)